

First Annual Conference

First Annual Community Oncology Conference held in Washington, DC

More than 300 community-based medical oncology professionals—including physicians, nurses, and practice managers—attended the First Annual Community Oncology Conference in February in Washington, DC. Keynote speaker for the conference was Rep. Nancy Johnson (R-CT), chairperson of the Health Subcommittee of the Ways and Means Committee.

One focus of the conference was Medicare reform, which is dismantling “the world’s finest cancer care

er state-of-the-art care everywhere in the country,” he said, citing as an example colleagues in Montana who fly to remote areas to treat patients. “If these and many other patients did not have community oncologists, they would not have access to any care.”

More than 80% of cancer patients in the United States are treated in private practice oncology offices and clinics, and their access to care is under threat, said Dr. Schwartzberg, medical director of The West Clinic in Memphis, which serves a popula-

tients as the population ages have all contributed to a crisis in community care. The conference was designed to address these issues, as well as the latest clinical data and best practices for providing care to patients living with cancer. More than 30 oncology experts took part as faculty.

The high cost of reform

“The impact of Medicare changes on community oncology is greater than anyone ever expected,” said Ted Okon, executive director of Community Oncology Alliance (COA), an advocacy group for cancer patients and practitioners whose mission is to foster and protect high-quality, affordable, and accessible cancer care for all Americans battling the disease. Doctors are having to send many of their patients to hospitals rather than treating them in their offices, which are often closer to patients’ homes and more comfortable for them, he pointed out. Mr. Okon reported that many physicians “are spending half their time working out their patients’ finances,” to pay for care. “Doctors can no longer afford to accept Medicare patients,” he said. “They are closing satellite facilities and as a result, we have heard from people who are traveling more than 200 miles for care.”

Educational sessions during the conference focused on bringing new advances from the laboratory to the clinic, with updates on specific tumors sites, such as the breasts, colon, lungs, prostate, and blood cancers.

The conference was hosted by Elsevier Oncology, Inc., and Reed Medical Education.



PANEL: From left to right, Ted Okon, Lee S. Schwartzberg, MD, Peter Bach, MD, and Rep. Nancy Johnson (R-CT).

delivery system,” said Lee Schwartzberg, MD, the conference chairman and Editor-in-Chief of *Community Oncology*, the official journal of the meeting. “Private practitioners deliv-

tion base of more than one million people in a tristate area.

Reductions in Medicare reimbursements, rising drug costs, and an increasing number of cancer pa-

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